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ABSTRACT

The Student Intent Survey at Westchester Community College (WCC), in New York, is designed to determine students' primary reasons for attending WCC, where they learned about the college, and their future plans for completing their education. In November 1994, the survey was distributed to students in 66 English Literature and Composition courses, receiving responses from 412 students, of whom 277 were first-semester students and were included in the sample. An analysis of responses revealed the following: (1) 76.9% of the respondents were attending full-time, 50.2% were female, and 77.6% were under the age of 22; (2) 55.2% reported that their primary motive for attending WCC was to transfer to a four-year college, while 23.1% indicated that they wanted to prepare for a first career; (3) 33.8% indicated that they first heard about WCC from a friend or parent, 24.7% from a WCC student, and 23.7% from a high school guidance counselor; (4) 80.5% indicated that the low tuition at WCC was an important factor in their decision to enroll, while 61.2% cited the nearness of the campus to their home; and (5) with respect to future educational plans, 45.8% indicated that they intended to transfer to a four-year college before graduating and 37.9% that they planned to earn a degree. (BCY)

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# STUDENT INTENT SURVEY
## Fall 1994

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# WCC Student Intent Survey: FALL 1994

## Purpose of Survey

The *WCC Student Intent Survey* is a short, six question survey designed to learn the following three *pieces* of information from first-time fall semester students. (1) Their primary reason for attending WCC, (2) How they first learned about WCC, and (3) Their future plans for completing their education.

Special importance is attached to the timing of the survey in the students' *career* (the first semester in college), since the results of this survey will be used as the first step in an assessment process which seeks to compare the original goals and intentions of these students with those actually achieved.

## Methodology

In November, 1994, *WCC Student Intent Surveys* were sent to English faculty members teaching 66 of the 107 freshman English Literature and Composition courses or Basic Writing Skills courses offered that semester. Out of the 66 classes receiving surveys, 29 returned completed surveys, giving a sample size of 412 students. This represents 16.7 percent of the 2,463 students taking a freshman English class in Fall 1994. Not all students in freshman English classes are first semester students, however. An additional run was done to include only those students that were, resulting in a sample of 277. For purposes of this report, the results of both samples are reported in the tables, but the smaller sample size of first-semester students is given in the text. For each question, nevertheless, the differences are minimal.

Since the survey is not a random sample, the results can not be said to be representative of the entire population of first-semester credit students taking a freshman English or remedial English course at WCC. The close approximation of the ethnic backgrounds of the respondents to the actual make-up of the freshman class, however, makes the results a good indicator.

## Profile of Students

As shown in Table 1, the ethnic characteristics of the students who responded to the survey roughly reflect those known to be the actual case for Fall 1994 freshmen: 66.8% were white, 12.6% Black, 13.7% Hispanic, and 4.0% Asian/Pacific..

In the case of age, full-time/part-time status, gender, and curriculum enrollments, the sample is less indicative of the 1994 Fall first-time credit student body. The sample showed that 76.9% were full-time students, and 23.1% were part-time. Half of the respondents were female (50.2%). Over three-fourths (77.6%) were under 22 years of age, 12.3% were 22 to 29, and 10.1% were 30 or over. The skewing of the sample in favor of full-time students and younger students is attributable to the fact that the survey was conducted only on the Valhalla campus, although for both day and evening classes. Plans have already been made to rectify this situation for the Fall 1995 survey.

With regard to curriculum enrollment, 31.0% were in an AA program, 37.0% in an AS program, 22.7% in an AAS program, 2.2% in a Certificate program and 6.1% reported not being enrolled in a curriculum. Over four-fifths (84.1% ) reported being a US citizen with 15.9% reporting they were not.

**Table 1: SURVEY SAMPLE COMPARED TO WCC ACTUALS**

| | FIRST-TIME RESPONDENTS Fall - 1994 | ACTUAL FIRST-TIME Fall - 1994 | FRESHMAN ENGLISH Class 1994 |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | | | |
| Male | 138 (49.8% ) | 1,286 (46.3%) | 198 (48.1%) |
| Female | 139 (50.2%) | 1,493 (53.7%) | 193 (46.8%) |
| Blank | 0 ( 0.0%) | 0 ( 0.0%) | 21 ( 5.1%) |
| **Ethnic** | | | |
| White | 185 (66.8%) | 1,750 (63.0%) | 254 (61.7%) |
| Black | 35 (12.6%) | 380 (13.7%) | 55 (13.3%) |
| Hispanic | 38 (13.7%) | 322 (11.6%) | 58 (14.1%) |
| Pacific/Asian | 11 ( 4.0%) | 109 ( 4.0%) | 15 ( 3.6%) |
| Other/Blank | 1 ( 2.9%) | 218 ( 7.7%) | 30 ( 7.2%) |
| **Status** | | | |
| Full-Time | 213 (76.9%) | 1,308 (47.1%) | 272 (66.3%) |
| Part-Time | 64 (23.1%) | 1,471 (53.0%) | 118 (28.6%) |
| **Total** | **277** | **2,779** | **412** |

## Findings

A summary of the responses to the six questions is as follows

## What is Your Primary Reason for Attending Westchester Community College?

Well over half (55.2%) of the respondents reported that their primary reason for attending WCC was to transfer to a 4-year college. This is almost the same percentage given by respondents to this same question posed in 1990 (55.7%), as shown in Table 2. Of particular note is that almost two-thirds (63.4%) of the full- time students compared to 28.1% of the part-time students selected transferring to a four-year college as their primary goal. Clearly, full-time students differ substantially from part-time students in their initial objective in attending WCC.

Another fourth (23.1%) of the students replied that their primary reason for attending was *To Prepare For A First Career*. A significant difference occurred between Black students and the other ethnic groups in the percentage who identified this as their primary goal. Well over a third of the Blacks (37.1%) identified this as a primary goal compared to 22.2% of the white students, 27.3% of the Pacific/Asian students, and 18.4% of the Hispanic students.

Of the other possible responses, 11.9% of the students selected *To Prepare for a Career Change*, 4.0% *For Personal Interest*, and 3.2% *To Improve Job Skills*. As might be expected, a much higher percentage of students age 22 to 29 (35.3%) and 30 to 49 (44.4%) selected *To Prepare for a Career Change* than their classmates under 22 years of age (4.2%).

**TABLE 2: WHAT IS YOUR PRIMARY REASON FOR ATTENDING WCC?**

| | FIRST-TIME STUDENTS: FALL 1994 | FRESHMAN ENGLISH STUDENTS: FALL 1994 |
|---|---|---|
| Transfer to a 4-year college | 153 (55.2%) | 223 (54.1%) |
| Prepare for first career | 64 (23.1%) | 88 (21.4%) |
| Prepare for a career change | 33 (11.9%) | 60 (14.6%) |
| Taking courses for personal use | 11 ( 4.0%) | 16 ( 3.9%) |
| Improve job skills | 9 ( 3.2%) | 15 ( 3.6%) |
| Blanks | 7 ( 2.5%) | 9 ( 2.2%) |
| **TOTAL** | **277 (100%)** | **411 (100%)** |

## How Did You First Learn About WCC?

The most frequent way students first learn about WCC is not through efforts by the college or by the high schools from which they come. Instead, as shown in Table 3, it happens most frequently in the old fashioned way, by word-of-mouth. One-third (33.8%) of the students reported that they had first heard about WCC from a friend or a parent. Another fourth (24.7%) reported their first source had been from a WCC student. These two sources combined (58.5%) comprise almost three-fifths of the responses to this question.

High school guidance counselors also are an important first source. A fourth (23.7%) of the students reported hearing about WCC first from them. As might be expected, almost one-third (32.1%) of the respondents under age 22 identified this as their first source.

After *high school guidance counselors*, the importance of other sources drops off considerably. In descending order they are. *In a Mailing I Received* (9.8%), *A College Fair* (3.7%), *A Newspaper* (2.0%), *A WCC Admissions Officer* (1.3%) and *The Radio*, (0.6%)

**TABLE 3: HOW DID YOU FIRST LEARN ABOUT WCC?**

| | FIRST-TIME STUDENTS: FALL 1994 | FRESHMAN ENGLISH STUDENTS: FALL 1994 |
|---|---|---|
| A parent or friend | 100 (33.8%) | 142 (32.1%) |
| From a current/former WCC student | 73 (24.7%) | 111 (25.1%) |
| High school Guidance Counselor | 70 (23.7%) | 102 (23.1%) |
| In a mailing I received about WCC | 29 ( 9.8%) | 44 ( 9.9%) |
| A College Fair | 11 ( 3.7%) | 19 ( 4.3%) |
| In a newspaper | 6 ( 2.0%) | 9 ( 2.0%) |
| WCC Admissions Office | 4 ( 1.3%) | 10 ( 2.2%) |
| The radio | 2 ( 0.6%) | 4 ( 0.9%) |
| **TOTAL** | **295 (100%)** | **441 (100%)** |

## How Important Was the Low Tuition At WCC In Deciding To Enroll ?

The responses given by students leaves little doubt of the importance of low tuition in influencing students' decision to attend WCC. Well over half (56.3%) responded that it was *Very Important*, as shown in Table 4, and another fourth (24.2%) indicated it was *Important*. Combined, four-fifths of the respondents (80.5%) identified *low tuition* as an important factor in deciding to attend WCC.

A review of the responses broken down by gender, ethnic background, and age showed that for Black and Hispanic students, in particular, and for older students in the age categories of 22 to 29 and 30 and over, a significantly higher percentage of students identified low tuition as being *very important*

**TABLE 4: HOW IMPORTANT WAS THE LOW TUITION IN DECIDING TO ENROLL?**

| | FIRST-TIME STUDENTS: FALL 1994 | FRESHMAN ENGLISH STUDENTS: FALL 1994 |
|---|---|---|
| Very important | 156 (56.3%) | 236 (57.3%) |
| Important | 67 (24.2%) | 101 (24.5%) |
| Not very important | 33 (11.9%) | 46 (11.2%) |
| Not very important at all | 17 ( 6.1%) | 22 ( 5.3%) |
| Blanks | 4 ( 1.4%) | 7 ( 1.7%) |
| **TOTAL** | **277 (100%)** | **412 (100%)** |

## How Important Was the Nearness of WCC to Your Home In Deciding to Enroll?

Over a fourth of the students (28.5%) identified *The Nearness of WCC to Your Home* as being *Very Important* in influencing their decision to attend, as shown in Table 5. Another third (32.9%) indicated it was *Important*. This comprises 61.2% of the respondents. However, 36.8% of the respondents indicated it was either *Not Very Important* (27.4%) or *Not Important At All* (9.4%)

When these responses are broken down on the basis of demographic sub-groups, a significantly higher percentage of females (68.4%) than males (54.3%) indicated that *Nearness to Your Home* was either a *Very important* or *Important* factor. Students under 22 proved to be less concerned about the proximity of WCC to their homes than their elders, as did full-time students.

**TABLE 5: HOW IMPORTANT WAS THE NEARNESS OF WCC TO YOUR HOME IN DECIDING TO ENROLL?**

| | FIRST-TIME STUDENTS: FALL 1994 | FRESHMAN ENGLISH STUDENTS: FALL 1994 |
|---|---|---|
| Important | 91 (32.9%) | 143 (34.7%) |
| Very important | 79 (28.5%) | 128 (31.1%) |
| Not very important | 76 (27.4%) | 101 (24.5%) |
| Not very important at all | 26 ( 9.4%) | 32 ( 7.8%) |
| Multiple answers/Left blank | 5 ( 1.8%) | 8 ( 1.9%) |
| **TOTAL** | **277 (100%)** | **412 (100%)** |

## What Are Your Future Plans?

The largest percentage of students (45.8%) indicated that they intended to *Transfer to a 4-year College Before Graduating*, as shown in Table 6. This is particularly the case for full-time students and students under 22 years of age, the two of which overlap considerably. However, 37.9% of the students indicated that they planned *To Earn a Degree At WCC*. As expected, this was more the case for part-time students and students *over* 22 years, especially those over 30. In fact, two-thirds of the 30 and older students indicated they intended to earn a degree at WCC. A substantially higher percentage of white students (50.8%) than Blacks (34.3%) or Hispanics (36.8%) also indicated they intended to transfer rather than earn a degree.

Of the other possible responses, 9.0% selected *To Earn a Certificate at WCC*, 3.6% selected *To Stay One Semester*, and 1.1% *To Transfer Courses to A Home College*.

**TABLE 6: WHAT ARE YOUR FUTURE PLANS?**

| | FIRST-TIME STUDENTS: FALL 1994 | FRESHMAN ENGLISH STUDENTS: FALL 1994 |
|---|---|---|
| Transfer to a 4-year college before graduating | 127 (45.8%) | 161 (39.1%) |
| Earn a degree at WCC | 105 (37.9%) | 176 (42.7%) |
| Earn a certificate at WCC | 25 ( 9.0%) | 35 ( 8.5%) |
| Stay one semester | 10 ( 3.6%) | 15 ( 3.6%) |
| Transfer course to home college | 3 ( 1.1%) | 5 ( 1.2%) |
| Blanks | 7 ( 2.5%) | 19 ( 4.6%) |
| **TOTAL** | **277 (100%)** | **411 (100%)** |

## Summary and Conclusion

Three findings, in particular, stand out in reporting the results of the ***WCC Student Intent Survey*** conducted on first-time students taking freshman English Literature and Composition courses or Basic Writing courses in Fall 1994.

**First, full-time students differ significantly from part-times students in their primary reason for attending WCC.** Almost two-thirds of the full-time students (63.4%) compared to only 28.1% of the part-time students selected *Transferring to a Four-Year College* as their primary goal. Since full-time students overlap heavily with students who are under 22 years of age, efforts to reach and to fulfill the primary goal of this younger, full-time group needs to focus more on their ability to transfer.

In contrast, part-time students have a broader range of reasons for attending WCC. While over one-fourth (28.1%) selected *transferring* as their primary goal, still another fourth (28.1%) identified *Preparing for a Career Change*, another fourth (24.4%) *Preparing for a First Career*, and 12.5%, *Taking courses for Personal Interest*. In reaching and fulfilling the primary goal of the part-time student, therefore, attention must be given to the much broader array of goals that might be motivating the student to enroll at WCC.

**Secondly, word-of-mouth and high school counselors are the most frequent way students learn about WCC.** Almost three-fifths of the students (58.6%) first learned about WCC from either a friend or parent (33.8%) or from another WCC student (24.7%). Another fourth (23.7%) of the students reported hearing about WCC first from their high school guidance counselor. The importance of other sources such as *Mail Received from WCC* (9.8%), a *College Fair* (3.70%), *a Newspaper* (2.0%), *a WCC Admissions Officer* (1.3%), or *The Radio*, (0.6%) are distant runners in terms of recruiting prospective WCC students, at least according to student recollection. On the basis of these findings it would appear that efforts by the Alumnae office and Counselors to make graduates and current students more aware of their importance in recruiting WCC students, and continued efforts by the Admissions office to work with high school counselors is time well spent.

**Thirdly, almost the same percentage of first semester students plan to transfer to a four-year college (45.8%) as plan to stay at WCC ( 46.4%) to earn either a degree (37.4%) or a certificate (9.0%).** Thus, while a disproportionate percentage of full-time, first-time students have as their primary goal *To Transfer*, taken as an entire entering class almost half of the first-time Fall 1994 students plan to stay at WCC and graduate. The group that plans to graduate, however, is composed disproportionately of part-time students. In light of this, it appears that greater recognition of the importance of part-time students as our graduate seekers is warranted.

One further observation regarding the results of the survey. Administrators and faculty have long recognized the importance of *Low Tuition* in influencing students to attend WCC. Lest there be any doubt, the results of this survey remove it. Well over half indicated it was *Very Important* (56.3%) and another fourth said is was *Important* (24.2%). Taken together, four-fifths of the Fall 1994 entering student respondents (80.5%) were strongly attracted to WCC by the low tuition.

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